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ALTERNATIVE UCP STRUCTURES FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT

Reductions in force structure, increasing worldwide interconnectedness, and future warfighting concepts are all creating challenges to the way defense requirements can be best met for the next century. Through all this current and projected change, the structure and size of geographic unified commands has changed little. Focusing on daily nation-building, confidence and security building measures, and building regional interoperability may support the national security strategy, but may also cause too much myopia on CINC staffs by ignoring the increasing interaction in information exchanges, economic factors, and military coalitions on participation outside the AOR. There is also an increasing gulf between the military actions proposed in doctrine and documents like Joint Vision 2010 and the daily operations in many countries where the threats are primarily from internal strife caused by weak infrastructures and transnational threats.

This paper proposes a number of alternative structures for geographic CINCS which address the changing security environment and may make better use of a shrinking force structure at a time when threats have become less easily quantified and often belie a military response. Alternatives range from a dissolution of strictly geographic CINCS to a more modest reorganization within existing CINC structures which better utilize a limited number of joint billets and builds a bridge between the CINC headquarters and the troops deployed in theater, enhancing joint operations and expanding exposure to joint command and control.

“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”

- Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Introduction

The end of the Cold War, the growth of global economic interaction, and the information explosion have all changed the framework in which U.S. interests and threats to them are defined. As is characteristic of other post-war periods, defense spending and force size have been reduced. The ability to maintain a viable fighting force capable of winning major regional contingencies while continuing the day-to-day operations which increasingly encompass taskings with little connection to traditional warfighting tasks is challenging. Those who should be most concerned with meeting this challenge are the unified commands. While there are nine total combatant commands, it is the five geographic commanders in chief (CINCs) who are increasingly pulled in several directions trying to fulfill tasks assigned by the Joint Staff as well as to identify and address those in theater which are vital to fulfilling the National Military Strategy (NMS). Having an Area of Responsibility (AOR) assigned allows the CINC to focus on a particular region and build ties to military and political forces. In this era of growing world interaction, however, this AOR constraint may constrain thinking as well, as countries and states within the AOR are increasingly interacting with those outside, both economically and militarily. It may be time to seriously consider ideas for reshaping the organization of these commands to better address changing security issues.

History

While the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 is often portrayed as the beginning of jointness in the U.S. military, unified commands predate it by many years. Every student of military history learns of the great personality and organizational conflicts with which our military leadership struggled during World War II in the Pacific Theater, which pitted Admiral Nimitz's grand naval strategy against General MacArthur's classic Army ground campaign. Resolution gave each a theater of operations, but boundaries between them continued to cause problems. Both Nimitz and MacArthur, despite disagreeing on the best avenue of approach to the Japanese homeland, nevertheless relied on troops from all three services to carry out their strategies. This disagreement on who fights where and when was resolved after the war in 1946 by establishing seven specific unified commands with forces and missions assigned as appropriate. Thus began the concept of the unified command plan.¹

Within a year, changes to missions and force structure elicited changes to the plan, a dynamic process that continues to this day. Many of the current unified commander's responsibilities have been embodied in past plans, only to change in concert with the nation's view of defense requirements and evolving world political structures. The idea, however, that a continuity greater than that of previous post-war periods was in the national strategic interest, led to permanent unified commands with broad strategic responsibilities. One directive of Goldwater-Nichols is to require this process of evaluation of size, roles and missions to occur at regular intervals by directing the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff to

¹ Ronald H. Cole et al., The History of the Unified Command Plan (Washington: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint History Office, 1995), 11-14.

conduct a review of the Unified Command Plan (UCP) no less frequently than every two years, thus transforming a 1979 policy into law.

When Goldwater-Nichols passed in 1986, the United States was still very much embroiled in the Cold War, and there was little doubt where the axis of threat lay. The USSR was not in any CINC's AOR. Instead, CINCs concentrated on protection of U.S. interests in those countries which were likely targets for Soviet attack or intervention. EUCOM, in concert with NATO, concentrated on training and deploying to counter a conventional force attacking from the east. Since PACOM's AOR abutted the western edge of the threat, it also had obvious defense tasks. SOUTHCOM was embroiled in assistance to countries resisting communism, in order to keep the USSR from gaining another strategic foothold in the Western Hemisphere.

Today's Environment

Since then, the changes in the world's power structure have radically changed the security landscape. The breakup of the Soviet Union is one facet of this alteration. Another parallel cause, however, is the explosion of information via the revolution of related technology. "Communism collapsed, in part, because the information revolution forced its governments to face a choice between openness and the possibility of their own demise or perpetual economic impoverishment and increasing civil upheaval."² The global village connected by the information highway is a reality, and has real ramifications for the way the United States defines vital interests and with what means to protect them. Attacks against computerized systems can originate anywhere in the world, and often reach their ultimate

² Kevin J. Kennedy et al., Grand Strategy for Information Age National Security (Virginia: Defense Technical Information Center, 1996), 4-9.

target through links via other countries not necessarily neighbors, or even in the same hemisphere.³ The chances that attacks will come from other parties besides legitimate governments is also greater than ever before.

It is clear from history that unified commands were established, changed, and sometimes done away with as the specific threats required. Since 1986, however, the geographic unified commands have changed little, swapping some real estate and water from one to another, and vying for growth through the assignment of former Soviet Union countries, Mexico and Canada (Russia, Mexico and Canada remain unassigned).

The threat has certainly changed, though, as has the force structure of the U.S. military. Vital interests have always been tied in some degree to economic security, and past changes in the UCP have reflected this to some extent. In today's world, the disruption of information flow across borders can be as dangerous to commerce as the disruption of raw materials in sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and trade agreements like that in the European Common Market result in practical dissolution of national boundaries. The need arises to review the roles and missions of the unified commands in light of this new reality and consider alternative structures to their organization which recognize inherent strengths and weaknesses, and embody the concepts of Joint Vision 2010, the operational template of the future. "With the formation of the European Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, great power rivalry in particular and the nation-state in general are fading somewhat in importance."⁴

³ *ibid.*, A-1.

⁴ Martin Libicki, "The Revolution in Military Affairs," *Strategic Forum*, <<http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/z1106.html>> (10 April 1998), 1.

It is generally agreed that there is a current revolution in military affairs (RMA) which is directly related to the use of information superiority to dominate the battlespace. Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski has stated "This revolution in military affairs is driven by the seismic upheaval in information technology that is causing a tidal wave of change throughout society."⁵ JV2010 calls for full spectrum dominance brought about through operational concepts which all rely on information superiority. Service visions derived from these JV2010 concepts make extensive use of technological advances to make our troops smarter, safer and more lethal from greater distances. Integrating technology into weapons systems is not enough to characterize a true RMA. How these new systems are employed, and in what manner the organization changes to take advantage of these advances are equally important. To both use these new concepts and protect against information warfare threats to U.S. systems, combatant command structure needs to be assessed.

The geographic commanders in chief (CINCs) are configured for operations in set areas of responsibility (AOR) which range from small and relatively homogeneous to large and diverse. U.S. vital interests in each and the threats emerging from them are equally diverse. What's more, in those CINCDoms or portions thereof where threats to vital interests from a recognized political entity are virtually non-existent (e.g., SOUTHCOM, USACOM, and sub-Saharan Africa under EUCOM), JV2010's high-tech, deep battlespace, agile maneuver concepts don't easily integrate into a strategy aimed primarily at nation-building and regional stability. As warfighting becomes more reliant on long-range precision weaponry and network-centric warfare, the gap between what is required of combat troops

⁵ VADM Arthur K. Cebrowski, quoted in Leslie West, "Exploiting the Information Revolution," Seapower, March 1998, 38.

and troops engaged in the lower-tech end of military operations other than war grows larger. At the same time, so does the gap between CINC daily operations and their relevance to the ability to fight a major theater war.

The National Security Strategy (NSS) champions engagement and enlargement as the road to securing U.S. interests. Its three core objectives are: "To enhance our security with effective diplomacy and with military forces that are ready to fight and win. To bolster America's economic prosperity. To promote democracy abroad."⁶ While promoting democracy fulfills the Jeffersonian ideals on which this country was built and became a world power, it isn't the only road to economic prosperity. Nevertheless, CINCs must formulate their strategies from the derivative NMS, which describes the military contribution in the vague terms of shaping the environment, responding to threats, and preparing for an uncertain future.⁷ This is certainly a step away from the clarity of previous strategies that focused on deterrence of aggression, defense of U.S. interests, and fighting to win the nation's wars, words more easily translatable into traditional military applications. In theaters as diverse as those currently assigned, it is easy to see that the full range of military operations may be exercised, increasing the complexity of planning and resource allocation. Because the CINCs have specific AORs, this regional hegemony can also lead to a parochialism similar to that of which services are often accused, only on a geographic scale. The difficulty with which the UCP was changed to shift the Caribbean region from

⁶ The White House, A National Security Strategy For a New Century, May 1997, i.

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of the Chairman, National Military Strategy of the United States of America. Washington: 1997, 1.

USACOM to USSOUTHCOM is a prime example, a change that was still being debated at the subsequent review.

What, then, determines the boundaries of a geographic CINC? The answer doesn't seem to flow from a particular military necessity in all cases. Some potential military hot spots, such as the Arabian Gulf region or the Korean Peninsula are each encompassed in a respective CINCs' AOR. Others are separated, as is the case of Israel from the rest of the Middle East, and India from Pakistan. Some CINCs argue a separation is necessary in order to stay engaged in each country. Separate CINCs may mean no perceived favoritism in military support. In other cases where the U.S. is militarily engaged within countries that are potential belligerents, the argument of maintaining unity of effort is offered as support for keeping both in one AOR.

There are obviously areas of the world where hostilities are possible which can have great bearing on national interests, and a geographic CINC with regional focus has some validity. The problem arises when the same CINC carries out a peacetime engagement that often seems divorced from the real threat, or fails to anticipate results of that engagement. The continuation of security assistance to Panama until OPERATION JUST CAUSE is a case in point. What is more significant is that the AOR borders can easily be drawn differently depending on the mission.

Other CINC missions in an AOR include training regional armed forces for a variety of tasks. The reality that coalitions will be required in many if not most conflicts requires CINCs to train for interoperability with regional forces. Peacekeeping, especially under UN auspices, is one such example. The interoperability required is usually defined by what the

CINC decides is best for his AOR. However, forces from one AOR will often participate in these missions in another, combined with forces from yet a third AOR. Building a regional peacekeeping force in Central America will require a different kind of interoperability than preparing Chilean naval forces to participate in exercises with Pacific Rim countries.

Other CINC missions run the full spectrum of military operations, and are as diverse as drug interdiction and humanitarian assistance. As more threats are grouped under the heading of transnational, the question of unity of effort becomes even more important. Can a geographic CINC, depending on the diversity of his AOR, realistically prepare to do all the missions required? Is there always a creditable threat to U.S. interests which requires a military response in some areas of the world?.

The National Command Authority (NCA) has done a poor job in both establishing the clear national interests the U.S. has around the world and what exactly it expects the military to do in defense of them. This may be the single biggest obstacle to change. The U.S. military has always relied on civilian leadership to concern itself with strategic threats that required military intervention, or least, vigilance, but the latest iteration of the NSS articulates the increasingly blurred lines between military options and other responses to threats. The requirement to shape the environment "...in ways that protect and promote U.S. interests"⁸ leaves the military bereft of the guidance required to solidify a viable military strategy against identified threats. The NSS does, however, recognize that preparing for the future may require "...innovation in new operational concepts, capabilities, technologies and

⁸ The White House, 8.

organizational structures;”⁹ and the armed forces need to consider this in order to better identify and plan responses for threats to vital national interests.

Alternative Organizations

The 1997 UCP review did not seriously consider radical changes, as the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) was underway. The outcome of the QDR resulted in little change in the way forces were organized, and was criticized as a salami-slice approach to defense cuts. It is time for the CINCs to take the lead in preparing for the future by taking a hard look at the way business is done. Without clearly identifying what needs to be done and why, and developing measures of effectiveness that can prove a military solution is the appropriate response, they will become paper tigers. The first look has to be internal.

The most recent UCP review required CINCs to consider several radical changes to their organizations. Senator Charles Robb (D-VA) was very up-front in discussing his role in this requirement as embodied in the FY97 National Defense Reorganization Act.¹⁰ It is obvious from the newest version of the UCP that all his proposals were dismissed, but his concepts bear examining. The success of functional commands such as the U.S. Transportation Command and the U.S. Special Operations Command shows that a task-oriented command structure with specifically trained forces can easily engage and operate globally. As a way to satisfy the requirement of responsiveness to a dual major regional contingency, (now referred to as major theater war-MTW) two unified commands can be formed, one to fight in the first theater and the second for reserve or to fight the second theater war. The first theater command would be kept at a high state of readiness, while the

⁹ *ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰ Charles S. Robb, “Examining Alternative UCP Structures,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Winter 1996-97, 86.

second was in a standdown similar to that of a returning Navy battle group. Commands would rotate responsibilities regularly. A third command would also be formed, responsible for stability enhancement. It would do all those tasks that fall under the broad heading of peace operations. Benefits accrue from needing less training on expensive weaponry for troops assigned to this command. This approach comes very close to implying the creation of a separate service, separating, as Senator Robb says, "...personnel with a 'safety on' peacekeeping mindset from those soldiers with the warrior spirit required by other unified commands."¹¹ Philip Gold is more blunt. "If this means creating, de facto, two armies, one for combat and one for noncombat operations, that may be a better - or less bad - structure than maintaining the fiction of 'general purpose forces.'"¹² This is highly unlikely, however, given the personnel-intensive nature of most of these tasks. In light of the force reductions to date, creating a new force from a different recruit base without further offsetting cuts in warfighters or defense budgets is unimaginable. If the defense department had been successful arguing against reductions in the past as a danger to warfighting readiness, there wouldn't be a problem.

An alternative structure may be to create a warfighting CINC and a CINC for military operations other than war (MOOTW), with all forces assigned to a training/force provider CINC. The warfighting CINC would focus on the planning for full spectrum dominance anywhere in the world, and provide training and force capability requirements to the training CINC. This headquarters would necessarily track personnel and operations tempo, and look

¹¹ *ibid.*, 92.

¹² Philip Gold, U.S. Searches in the Murk for its Mission, 06 October 1997, <<http://search.tribnet.com/archive/1097/1005b103.htm>> (13 April 1998).

for innovative ways to maintain readiness. Any opportunities to train to warfighting tasks or exercise infrastructure and new technologies required by the warfighting CINC would be integrated to the greatest extent possible in operations conducted by the MOOTW CINC. Not only would readiness be better maintained, this visible training could enhance the power projection role and clearly demonstrate U.S. resolve. A separate budget for each would place the responsibility for involvement back in the hands of the civilian leadership, rather than placing the service chiefs in the position of deciding what other tasks or programs must be cut to fund the latest unplanned peacekeeping operation. This is certainly more feasible than the creation of a non-combat oriented force. If the environment is so benign that armed forces aren't needed, then other governmental and non-governmental agencies should be the lead players. Where the risk of escalation into hostilities is present, combat ready troops must be deployed. This becomes ever more important in a world arms market where technology has made weapons systems small, affordable, and deadly.

Another solution, and one which may be more realistic in the near term, is to redraw the AORs based on threats. One of the major arguments for shifting the Caribbean region to SOUTHCOM was to facilitate drug interdiction efforts by combining the source zone and transit zone under one CINC. On a global scale, CINCs could be given responsibilities in countries most like each other in terms of culture, economics, and U.S. policy for engagement. This maintains a regional approach, and may simplify planning and operations. Options include putting sub-Saharan Africa under SOUTHCOM. While not uniformly equal, the countries of both regions share many of the same problems, have roughly equal impact on U.S. interests, and are in need of the same kind of military assistance. Excluding NATO

countries from EUCOM (unassigning them) would recognize the complete integration of U.S. forces in that area, and allow focus on the Balkans and former Soviet Union states that have been recently assigned. There are few tasks envisioned in NATO countries that won't be responded to by NATO forces. General Shalikashvili referred to our success in creating "...an integrated Europe, a condominium of nations whose security, whose economics and whose political systems were so intertwined that conflict between them grew more and more unthinkable."¹³ This type of reorganization may be the evolutionary step toward the previous option which eliminated geographic AORs, but maintains some flexibility to prepare for the uncertain future. For example, this structure can just as easily evolve into a three tier structure which recognizes three fairly distinct levels of capability worldwide.¹⁴ The First Tier CINC AOR would comprise those advanced, stable regions and states with information-based economies. Most threats to U.S. interests in these regions would involve sophisticated information warfare. The Second Tier CINC would focus on the emerging autonomous nation-states with industrial-based economies, that would be the most likely to wage conventional wars with each other. The Third Tier CINC will be most concerned with those states and regions characterized by internal strife and small, unconventional forces with little, if any, political oversight.

Because sweeping changes to the UCP are unlikely, given past history, CINCs may want to look at ways to reorganize internally that recognize the true needs of their AOR, that

¹³ John M. Shalikashvili, "Grand Challenges for the Post-Cold War World," Defense Issues, Volume 10, Number 69, 16 June 1995, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/di95/di1069.html>> (01 April 1998).

¹⁴ Steven Metz, "Strategic Horizons: Forward and Summary," Strategic Horizons: The Military Implications of Alternative Futures, 7 March 1997, <<http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usassi/ssipubs/pubs97/horizn/horiznss.htm>> (11 May 98)

use all the tools given them by Goldwater-Nichols, that embody JV2010 operational concepts, and improve their interaction within a global framework. "To organize for uncertainty, ironically, it may make sense to disorganize."¹⁵ The UNAAF has always allowed CINCs to organize as they see fit, and with minor doctrinal changes, these tools can be put to good use. Formation of Joint Task Forces (JTF) within the AOR is not new, but how they are formed and employed can be greatly expanded. JTFs could be established along functional or regional lines within the AOR. A regional approach would have JTFs act as the bridge between the country team and the theater CINC, balancing needs with regional impact. In those AORs where regional instability is caused by open or latent hostilities between countries, the JTF could evaluate, plan for, and, if required, direct operations to protect U.S. interests as defined in the CINC's regional strategy. This would help prevent the headquarters from becoming too involved in the current hot-spot to the detriment of the rest of the AOR. JTFs could also be organized on functional lines, as is already the case for the Joint Interagency Task Forces East and South. Although these have designated areas of operations, their missions are focused on the drug war. Functional JTFs would be used to better manage assets deploying in theater, and could help the CINC articulate resource requirements based on tasks and objectives. In both cases, the higher headquarters could then focus more strategically, and review how the theater interacts with others to enhance U.S. overall security. The headquarters would be relieved of much involvement in day-to-day

¹⁵ Thomas L. McNaugher, "Planning Future Defense: Time to Confront the Cold War Mindset," The Brookings Review, Summer 1996 Vol. 14 No. 3, <<http://www.brook.edu/pub/review/mcnasu96.htm>> (13 April 1998)

operations which tends to detract from creating broad strategic visions. In both cases the CINC's would retain their logistical and intelligence support to the JTFs.

The billets required for JTFs have to be created by the CINC's from their own resources. This usually means the component is tasked to provide the bodies, and adds to the ever increasing burden of demands on the force operators. The CINC's headquarters staff seems a better source. Billets can either be shifted, or staff members designated as dual-hatted. This will require some hard personnel choices by the CINC, but will increase efficiency in the long run by having more focused support for the operators in the field. Integration of these core JTF members into a larger organization as needed for contingencies gives the CINC greater autonomy than the current reliance on generic fly-away JTFs. It also expands the opportunities for joint operations experience for the staff and ensures that the CINC's strategic vision is better articulated into the task at hand. This is particularly important in AORs without adequate forces assigned, or where components are shared. This approach may require the geographic CINC's to look at ways to cut redundancy among the staffs and consolidate some functions common to all for more billet savings. The increasing ability to move information quickly and globally could lead to smaller intelligence directorates, as one example.

While joint doctrine advocates using the JTF as a means of pursuing a specific, limited objective, the creation of organizations like JTF-6 under USACOM and JTF-Bravo in SOUTHCOM shows a willingness on the part of CINC's to form standing organizations with ongoing missions. As threats come from more diverse sources, the lines blur between the agency or organization with the authority or resources to counter them. The idea of joint

interagency task forces like those set up for the drug war can be especially helpful in formulating coherent strategies in less developed parts of the world, and further enhance CINC-country team cooperation. This can go a long way towards eliminating redundancy of effort among the various U.S., PVO and NGO programs for engagement.

Conclusion

The uncertain future is here, epitomized by the difficulties the defense organization has in defining roles and missions which can be tied to specific U.S. interests and threats. Everything written concerning the current RMA, JV2010, and service visions point to a radically different force structure to meet the various challenges. With a view toward combining information technology across the spectrum of warfighting, investing in smaller, multi-mission capable forces and agile organizations, the overarching command structure could stand the same critical look. The sheer sizes of the unified commands and the joint staff invite outside attention, and are harder than ever to justify when combat forces are being visibly reduced. To avoid the same "salami slice" cuts for which the QDR was criticized, CINCs need to revisit their strategies, missions, and force structure and dedicate time to exploring alternatives. As the world becomes more and more connected through information technology, it can no longer be divided easily along geographic lines which encompass a homogeneous economic and cultural domain. Rather than continuing to put their head in the sand of their AOR, CINCs must remember that U.S. interests are worldwide, and activities in one AOR may have great effects in another. Higher headquarters need to focus more outwardly on how their strategies support the global security posture, and empower lower echelon commands and task forces to carry out operations.

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